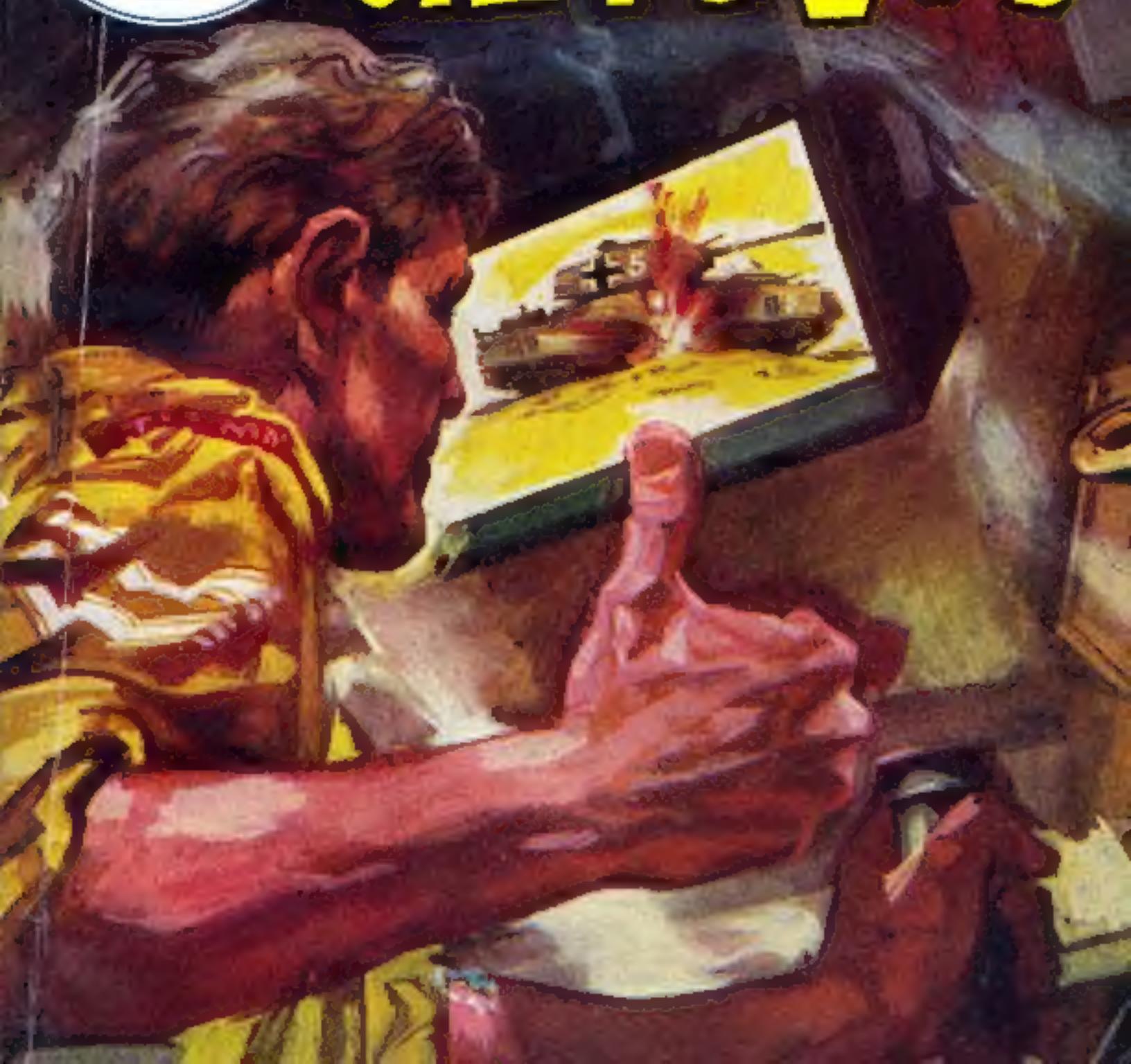


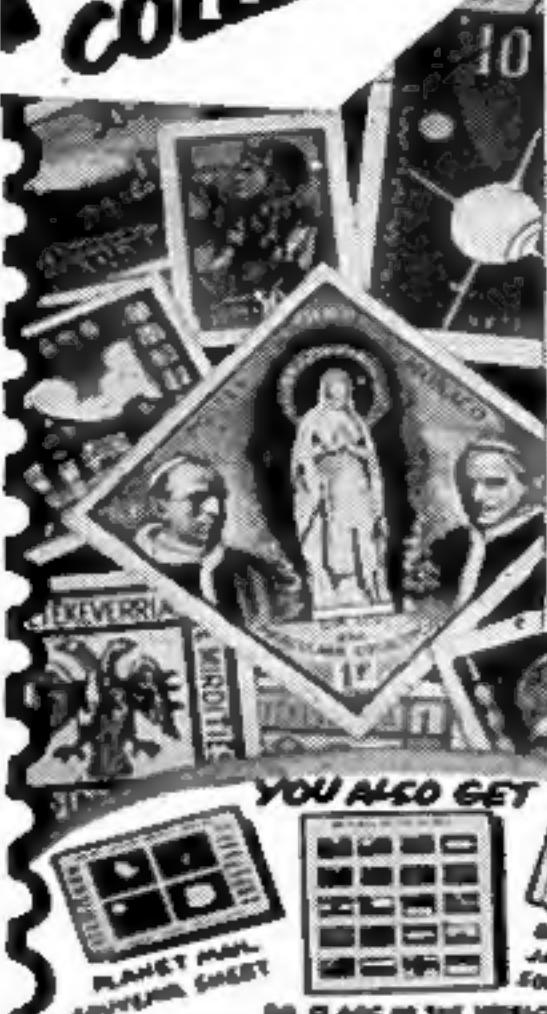
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OPEN SIGHTS



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OPEN SIGHTS

Fleetway Publications Ltd., 1962



SAND, OIL FUMES, THE ACRID STENCH OF CORDITE, THE SOUND OF THEIR OWN GUNS BATTERING ON THEIR EAR-DRUMS... FOR THE TANKMEN FIGHTING IN NORTH AFRICA, THESE WERE AMONG THE MAJOR DISCOMFORTS... THESE AND THE LASH OF ENEMY STEEL!

Chapter 1. *Unequal Combat*

IN THE SUMMER OF 1942, THE DRAGOON REGIMENT TO WHICH SERGEANT DAN MASON BELONGED WAS NEW TO THOSE DISCOMFITS.

HECK !
WE'VE RUN SLAP INTO A LOAD OF
TROUBLE ! IF THE
C.O. HAS ANY SENSE
HE'LL ORDER AN
ABOUT - TURN !



BUT SUCH AN ORDER WAS FAR FROM THE MIND OF THE REGIMENT'S COMMANDING OFFICER AT THAT MOMENT...

SUNRAY TO ALL SQUADRONS... WEAVE YOUR WAY FORWARD AND ENGAGE THE ENEMY !



Open Sights

DAN MASON COULD HARDLY BELIEVE HE HAD HEARD CORRECTLY.

ENGAGE THE ENEMY?
THE OLD MAN MUST BE OFF HIS ROCKER!



THE ENEMY MADE AN IMPRESSIVE AND FOWNDABLE SPECTACLE. IN NUMBERS THE OPPOSING FORCES WERE ABOUT EQUAL, BUT IN FIRE-POWER THERE WAS NO COMPARISON...

THE ENGLANDERS ARE ASKING TO BE ANNIHILATED, MERR HAUPTMANN. WHAT HARM CAN THEY DO US WITH THEIR THIRTY-SEVEN MILLIMETRE POOGUNS?



Open Sights

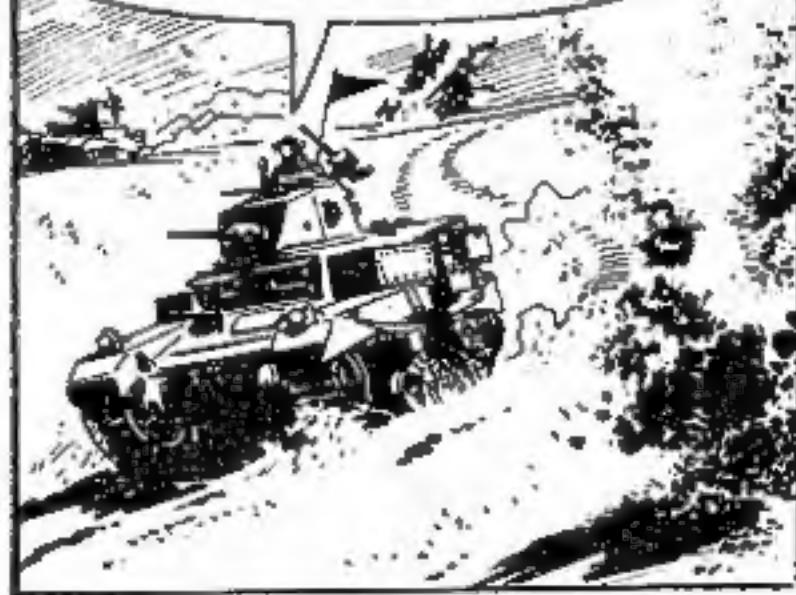
NO SHELLS WERE YET THREATENING THE FORMATION OF IRONCLADS WHICH HAD OPENED UP ON THE BRITISH. THEY WERE PANZERS OF THE AFRIKA KORPS, 23-TON MARK-FOURS...

OUR SEVENTY-FIVES WILL RIP THEM APART BEFORE THEY HAVE ANY OF US WITHIN THEIR RANGE, LEUTNANT.



OUTGUNNED, THE STUART HAD ONE OUTSTANDING FEATURE IN ITS FAVOUR. AN ADVANTAGE ON WHICH THE COLONEL OF THE BRITISH DRAGOONS WAS PREPARED TO GAMBLE DEEPLYERATELY...

WEAVE, I SAID! I WANT TO SEE EVERY TANK JINKING LIKE A HARE! THAT'S HOW WE CAN OFFSET THE HEAVIER PUNCH AND LONGER REACH OF THE JERRIES!



THE IDEA BEHIND THE COLONEL'S TACTICAL MANOEUVRE WAS GOOD. IF HIS DRAGOONS HAD BEEN VETERANS, THEY MIGHT HAVE MADE IT WORK... BUT THIS WAS THEIR BAPTISM OF FIRE...

FOR PETE'S SAKE, MARLAND! CAN'T YOU MAKE THIS BATTLEWAGON ACT MORE DOOGY? THROW HER AROUND A BIT...

I'M DOING MY BEST, SARN'T MASON.



THE REGIMENT TOOK CRUEL PUNISHMENT, TANK AFTER TANK FELL VICTIM TO THE FIRE OF THE HEAVY NAZI TANK-GUNS...

“GET OUT!
HURRY, SHE’LL
BREW UP ANY
SECOND!



THE GERMANS WERE BLASTING AWAY WITH HIGH-EXPLOSIVE AS WELL AS ARMOUR-PIERCING AMMO. MASON'S DRIVER SAW A LIEUTENANT AND TWO TROOPERS GO DOWN IN THE LURID FLASH OF AN H.E. SHELL.

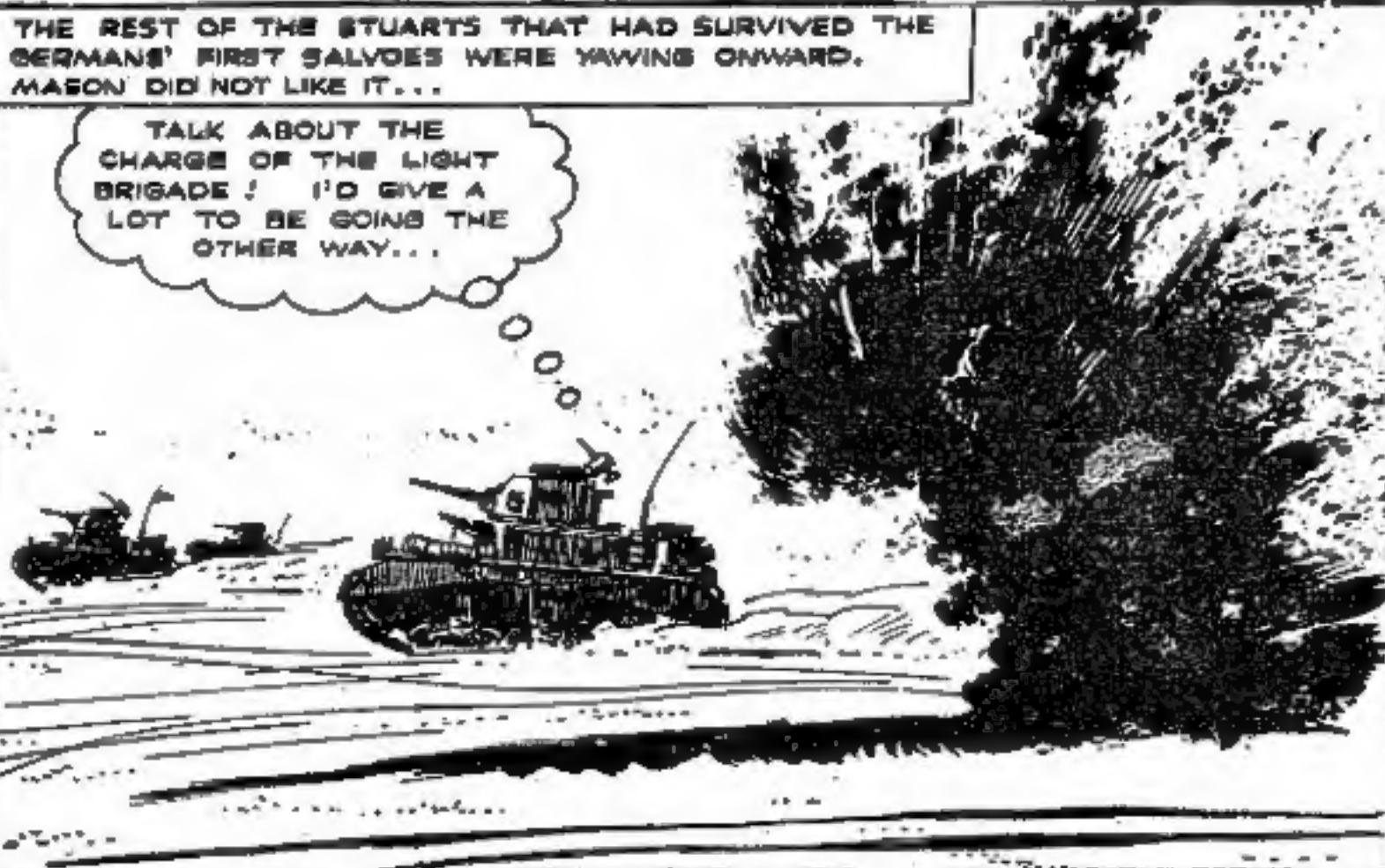


Open Sights



THE REST OF THE STUARTS THAT HAD SURVIVED THE GERMANS' FIRST SALVOES WERE YAWING ONWARD. MASON DID NOT LIKE IT...

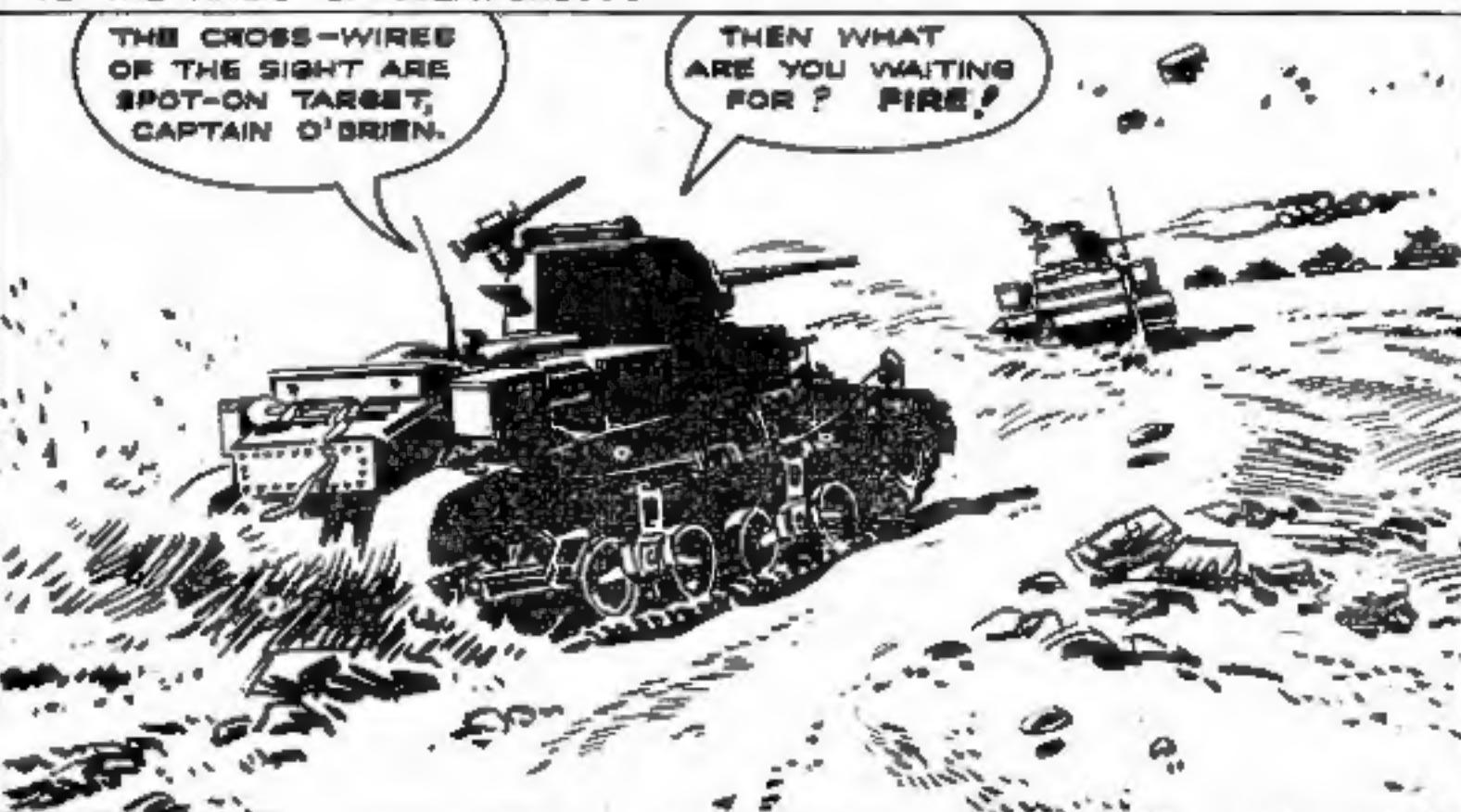
TALK ABOUT THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE! I'D GIVE A LOT TO BE GOING THE OTHER WAY...



THROUGH HIS PERISCOPE HE SAW TWO OF THE STUARTS WORK NEAR ENOUGH TO THE PANZERS TO SNAP AT THEM LIKE TERRIERS... CONTRARY TO THE NAZIS' SPECULATIONS...

THE CROSS-WIRES OF THE SIGHT ARE SPOT-ON TARGET, CAPTAIN O'BRIEN.

THEN WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? FIRE!



FOR A WEHRMACHT HAUPTMANN,
THE WAR ENDED IN THE JOLTING
BLAST OF A DESPISED 37-MILLIMETRE
SHELL !



BUT THE TWO STUARTS WERE SWIFTLY SLUDGEONED INTO SCRAP
METAL BY THE CONCENTRATED TORRENT OF GERMAN FIRE...

IT'S A
MASSACRE!
THIS WHOLE
SET-UP'S AN
OUT-AND-OUT
MASSACRE!

MAYBE SO, SARGE.
BUT ALL I WANT IS A
CRACK AT THOSE
PERISHING NAZIS! IF
HARLAND CAN GET US
A SHADE CLOSER...



Open Sights

MASON'S GUNNER WAS DENIED HIS WISH. THE DRAGOON'S COMMANDING OFFICER COULD SEE ONLY TOO CLEARLY THAT HIS GAMBLE HAD NOT PAID OFF — AND WOULD NEVER PAY OFF NOW.

I WISH THE OLD MAN WOULD KEEP HIS HEAD DOWN! IT FAIR GIVES ME THE SHIVERS TO WATCH HIM!

HALF OF US SHOT TO BITS IF I DON'T CALL OFF THE ADVANCE, THE REGIMENT WILL BE FINISHED. NOTHING FOR IT BUT TO

THE COLONEL'S ORDER CAME OVER THE AIR. MASON WAS THE FIRST MAN IN THE UNIT TO REACT!

SCARPER, MARLAND! SWING HER HARD ROUND AND STEP ON THE GAS!

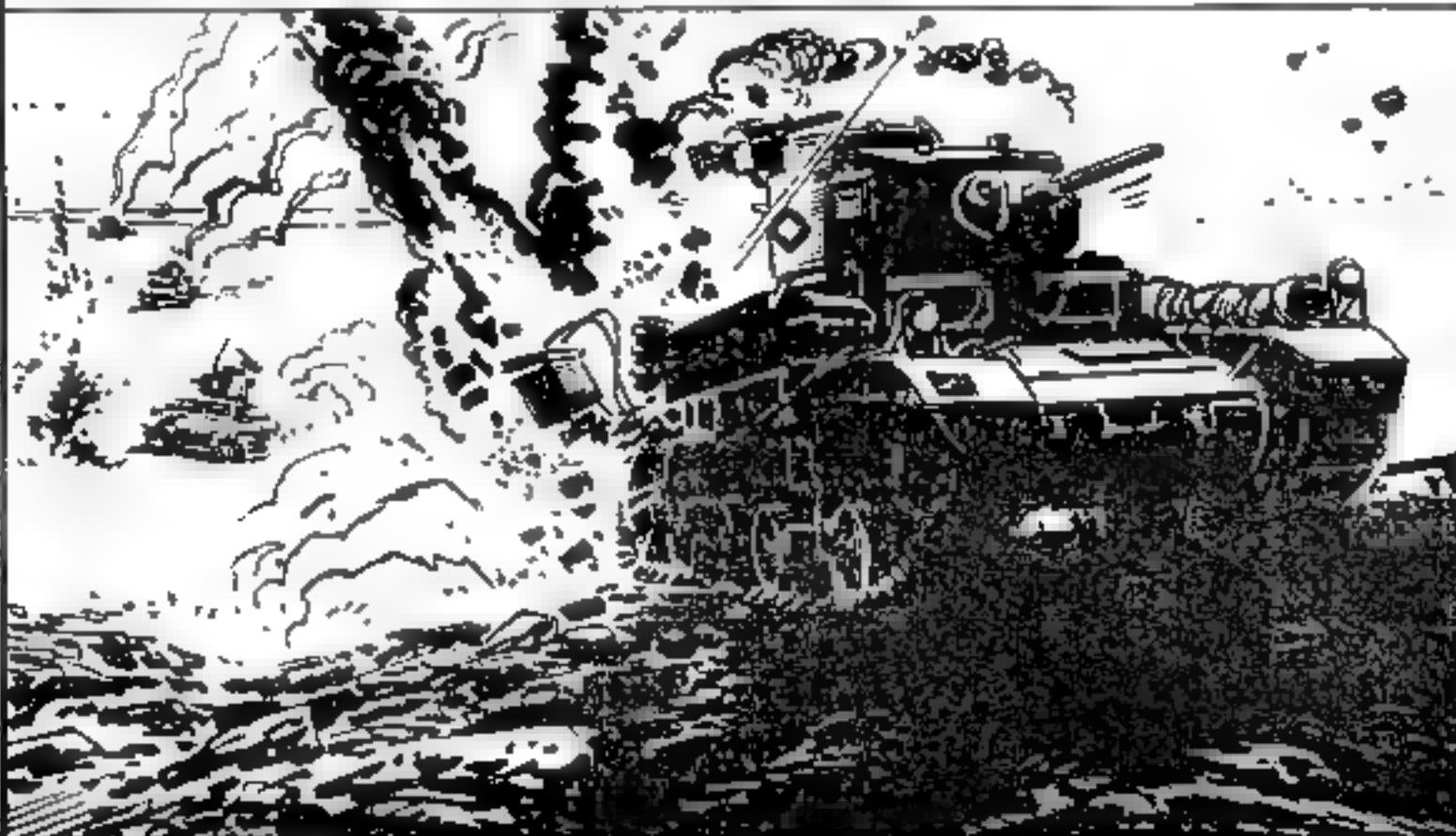
AIN'T IT BETTER TO BACK OUT OF ACTION, SARN'T, AND KEEP THE FRONT OF OUR HULL FACING THE ENEMY?

Open Sights

HARLAND WAS RIGHT. THE TANK'S ARMOUR PLATING WAS THICK IN FRONT, THIN AT THE BACK. BUT MASON WAS IN NO MOOD FOR A DISCUSSION ON BATTLE-DRILL...

DON'T ARGUE, HARLAND! GET TO HELL OUT OF HERE — FAST AS YOU CAN!

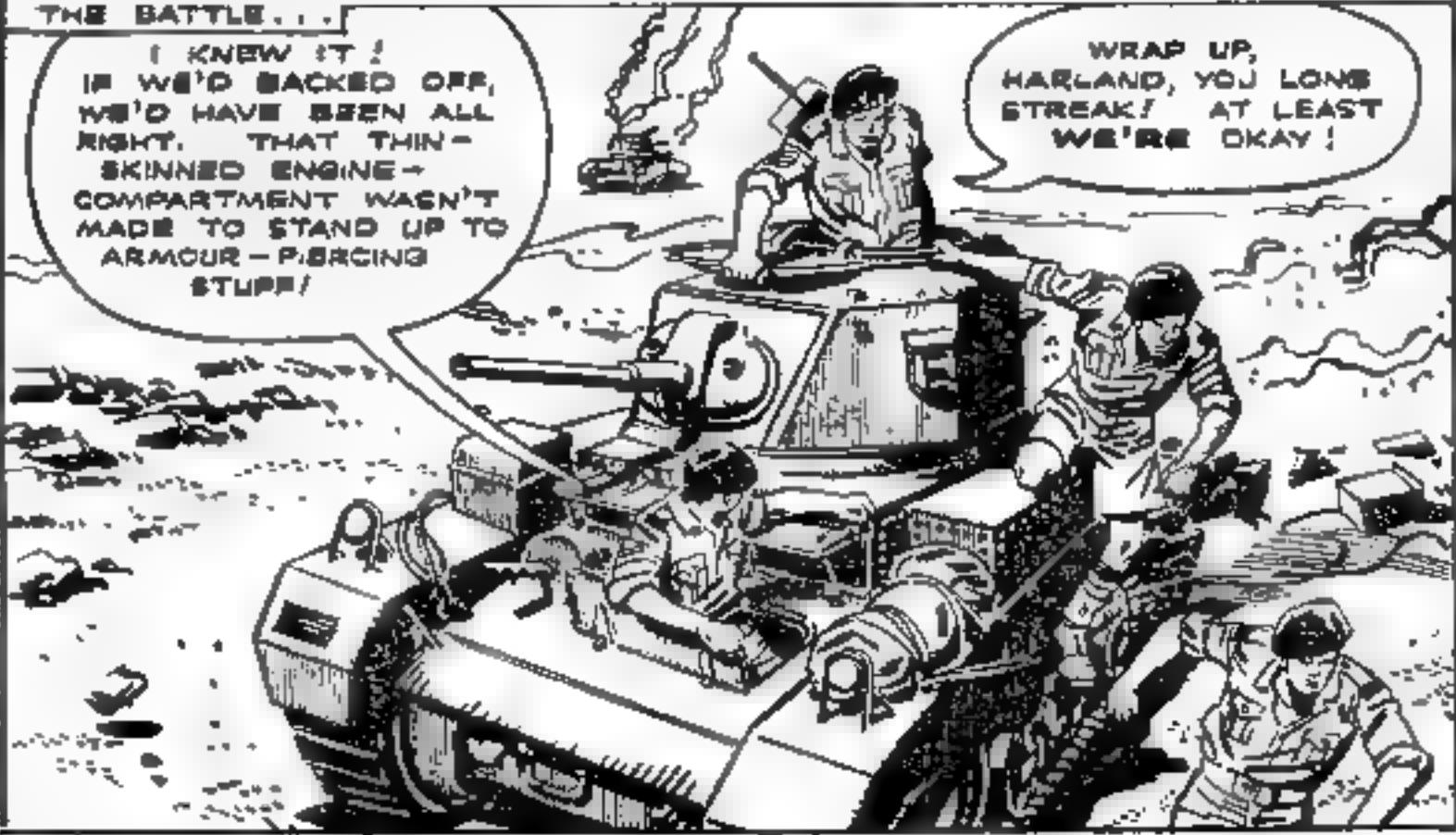
THE TANK TURNED TAIL UNDER HARLAND'S NIMBLE HANDS. IT WAS AT MAXIMUM RANGE WHEN A SHOT STRUCK IT!



AT THAT DISTANCE, THE THICKER ARMOUR AT THE FRONT OF THE HULL MIGHT HAVE STOOD UP TO THE IMPACT HAD THE TANK REVERSED FROM THE BATTLE...

I KNEW IT!
IF WE'D BACKED OFF,
WE'D HAVE BEEN ALL
RIGHT. THAT THIN-
SKINNED ENGINE-
COMPARTMENT WASN'T
MADE TO STAND UP TO
ARMOUR-PIERCING
STUFF!

WRAP UP,
HARLAND, YOU LONG
STREAK! AT LEAST
WE'RE OKAY!



DAN MASON AND HIS CREW DARTED FOR COVER... HARLAND, THE DRIVER... BOB GLENNIE, RADIO-MAN... AND SMUDGER SMITH, THE GUNNER.

WE'VE LOST MOST OF
OUR TANKS, BUT A GOOD
MANY OF THE CREWS SEEM
TO HAVE COME OFF
LUCKY...



Open Sights

THE SERGEANT STOPPED SHORT AS HARLAND SUDDENLY SPRANG TO HIS FEET...

WHAT'S UP WITH HIM?



NEITHER SMUDGER NOR GLENNIE KNEW THE ANSWER. BUT HARLAND'S PURPOSE WAS SOON PLAIN...

TAKE IT EASY,
MISTER FARRAN!
I'LL BE RIGHT
WITH YOU!



MASON WATCHED IN ASTONISHMENT AS HARLAND HELPED A FALLEN OFFICER TO HIS FEET AND BEGAN TO HALF CARRY HIM BACK TOWARDS THEM...



MAYBE ALL HARLAND'S AFTER IS ANOTHER TAP. HE SHOULD TAKE A TIP FROM ME... BOY-SOLDIER TEN YEARS AGO — SERGEANT AT THE START OF THE WAR WITHOUT HEARING A SHOT FIRED IN ANGER...



BUT SERGEANT MASON ENDED BY TALKING TO THE EMPTY AIR...

AND I GOT MY TAPES BY MEANING MY BOUNCE, NOT RISKING IT...

HARLAND'S IN TROUBLE, LET'S GIVE HIM A HAND!



Open Sights

SMUDGER AND GLENNIE SCURRIED FORWARD. WITH SHRAPNEL SLICING AROUND THEM, THEY HELPED HARLAND CARRY THE INJURED LIEUTENANT FARRAN BACK TO COVER.



THE WITHDRAWAL CONTINUED. WHAT WAS LEFT OF THE REGIMENT'S ARMOUR WAS LEAGUERED WITH THE SUPPLY-TRUCKS BEHIND A SCREEN OF INFANTRY

WHAT'S THE LATEST ON MISTER FARRAN, TOSH?

THE DOC SAYS HE'LL BE OKAY IN A WEEK OR SO. CONCUSSION, THAT'S ALL. NOT LIKE THE POOR FELLERS WHO WERE WITH H.M.



MISTER FARRAN ASKED
THE DOC TO THANK US—
AND GARN'T MASON—
FOR PICKING HIM
UP...

AND
SERGEANT
MASON? THAT'S
A LAUGH!



AFTER THE FIASCO OF THAT DAY, DAN
MASON'S STOCK DID NOT STAND
PARTICULARLY HIGH WITH HIS CREWMEN.

I USED TO THINK
MASON WAS TOUGH, BUT
I'VE CHANGED MY MIND
SINCE I SAW HIM IN
ACTION...

HIS TROUBLE IS
HE'S JUST OUT FOR
NUMBER ONE, SMUDGE
PROPER OLD SOLDIER,
KNOW WHAT I MEAN?



AT THAT MOMENT, THE 'OLD SOLDIER' WAS AIRING HIS VIEWS ON THE
DAY'S DISASTROUS BATTLE WITH THE ENEMY...

THREE STUARTS
DON'T STAND A
SARTHY AGAINST
THE JERRY TWENTY-
THREE TON
TANKS...

YOU'RE DEAD
RIGHT, MASON. LET'S HOPE
WE GET THE BIG AMERICAN
GENERAL GRANTS BEFORE WE
GO INTO ACTION AGAIN...



Chapter 2. Russian Front

THE DRAGOONS WERE PULLED BACK TO AN ENCAMPMENT NEAR CAIRO. FROM THERE, SELECTED PERSONNEL WERE SENT ON A SPECIALISED COURSE. . . .



LIEUTENANT FARRAN, DAN MASON, LANCE-CORPORAL HARLAND, BOB GLENNIE, SMUDGER SMITH — THEY WERE AMONG THOSE WHO HAD BEEN SELECTED. . . .

THESE HOTTED-UP VERSIONS OF THE OLD CHURCHILL ARE THE BEST THINGS I'VE SEEN. WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO GIVE THE JERRIES A HIDING NEXT TIME WE MEET 'EM!



THIRTY-EIGHT-AND-A-HALF-TON TANKS, UP-GUNNED FOR A SLUGGING-MATCH WITH THE AFRIKA KORPS' BEST... THESE WERE FITTING INSTRUMENTS OF VENGEANCE FOR THE EAGER DRAGOONS!

BRITISH TO THE LAST RIVET, EXCEPT FOR THE SEVENTY-FIVE MILLIMETRE CANNON IN THE TURRET. THAT'S AN AMERICAN JOB. THE CO-AXIAL MACHINE-GUN AND THE HULL MACHINE-GUN ARE BOTH BESAS



EVEN DAN MASON LOOKED WELL-SATISFIED, THOUGH HE WOULD NOT HAVE ADMITTED TO BEING EAGER FOR THE PRAY...

THAT'S MORE LIKE IT... THE ARMOUR'S A SIGHT DIFFERENT, TOO—OVER A HUNDRED MILLIMETRES THICK, INSTEAD OF THE STUARTS THIRTY ODD...



MASON SWITCHED HIS ATTENTION TO THE MAN WHO STOOD ON THE CHURCHILL'S HULL...

I WOULDN'T MIND BEING IN HIS BOOTS. CUSHY JOB, ACTING AS INSTRUCTOR...



Open Sights

A WEEK OR TWO LATER, THE DRAGOONS ON THAT COURSE RETURNED TO THEIR UNITS. WITHIN FORTY EIGHT HOURS OF REPORTING, DAN MASON FELT LIKE A MAN WHO HAD HAD A MAGIC WAND WAVED OVER HIM...



MASON'S FACE WAS DEADPAN...BUT HE FELT LIKE WHOOPING WITH JOY...

OUR ASSIGNMENT WILL TAKE US TO RUSSIA, SERGEANT...TO A PLACE CALLED STALINGRAD...

STALINGRAD...? NEVER HEARD OF IT, SIR... IS ANYBODY ELSE GOING BESIORS YOU AND ME MISTER FARRAN?



WE'RE TO MAKE
UP A TROOP—
FIFTEEN OF US,
ALL TOLD...



IT SEEMED A CONSIGNMENT OF THE MODIFIED CHURCHILLS WAS BEING DELIVERED TO SOVIET ARMY UNITS LYING IN RESERVE, DEEP BEHIND THE UKRAINE FRONT...

WE'LL PASS ON OUR KNOWLEDGE TO RUSSIAN PERSONNEL. I KNOW YOU'RE AS BRASSED OFF ABOUT THIS AS I AM, MASON, BUT WE'LL HAVE TO MAKE THE BEST OF IT.



FARRAN WOULD HAVE BEEN SHOCKED IF HE HAD KNOWN WHAT WAS PASSING THROUGH MASON'S MIND... LATER THAT AFTERNOON, THE SERGEANT GRINNED BROADLY AS HE CALLED HIS CREW TOGETHER

I'VE GOT NEWS FOR YOU COVES / GREAT NEWS!



Open Sights

HE TOLD THEM OF THE POSTING TO STALINGRAD, AND ROUNDED OFF HIS ACCOUNT OF IT WITH A SMUG PRONOUNCEMENT...



MARLAND AND BOB GLENN ECHOED SMUGGER'S SENTIMENTS. DAN MASON LOOKED AT THE THREE OF THEM PITYINGLY...

WHAT ARE YOU LOT — NUT-CASES OR SOMETHING? STAY HERE AND YOU STAND A GOOD CHANCE OF GETTING KILLED. AT STALINGRAD WE'LL BE SITTING PRETTY.

ALL WE WANT IS ANOTHER SMACK AT THE JERRIES, SARGE.



AT THAT THE SERGEANT LOST HIS TEMPER...

WELL, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO HAVE ANY PERISHIN' CHOICE, MATE. I'M PICKING YOU LOT TO GO WITH ME, AND NO ARGUMENTS...



THE MEN WHO WERE SELECTED TO GO TO RUSSIA WITH FARRAN AND MASON WERE PARADED IN THE C.O.'S TENT BEFORE LEAVING.

I APPRECIATE THAT YOU WANT TO REMAIN WITH THE REGIMENT, BUT I'M AFRAID IT'S OUT OF THE QUESTION. MY ORDERS HAVE COME FROM THE HIGHEST AUTHORITY



SO IT WAS THAT ONE OFFICER, ONE SERGEANT AND THIRTEEN DISGRUNTLED OTHER-RANKS ENTRAINED FOR A JOURNEY WHICH WAS TO TAKE THEM THROUGH PALESTINE, SYRIA AND IRAN

ALL ABOARD, LADS. MAKE IT SNAPPY.

LOOK ALIVE! IF YOU LOT DON'T WAKE YOUR IDEAS UP, THE RUSSEKIES ARE GOING TO WISH YOU'D STAYED AT HOME!

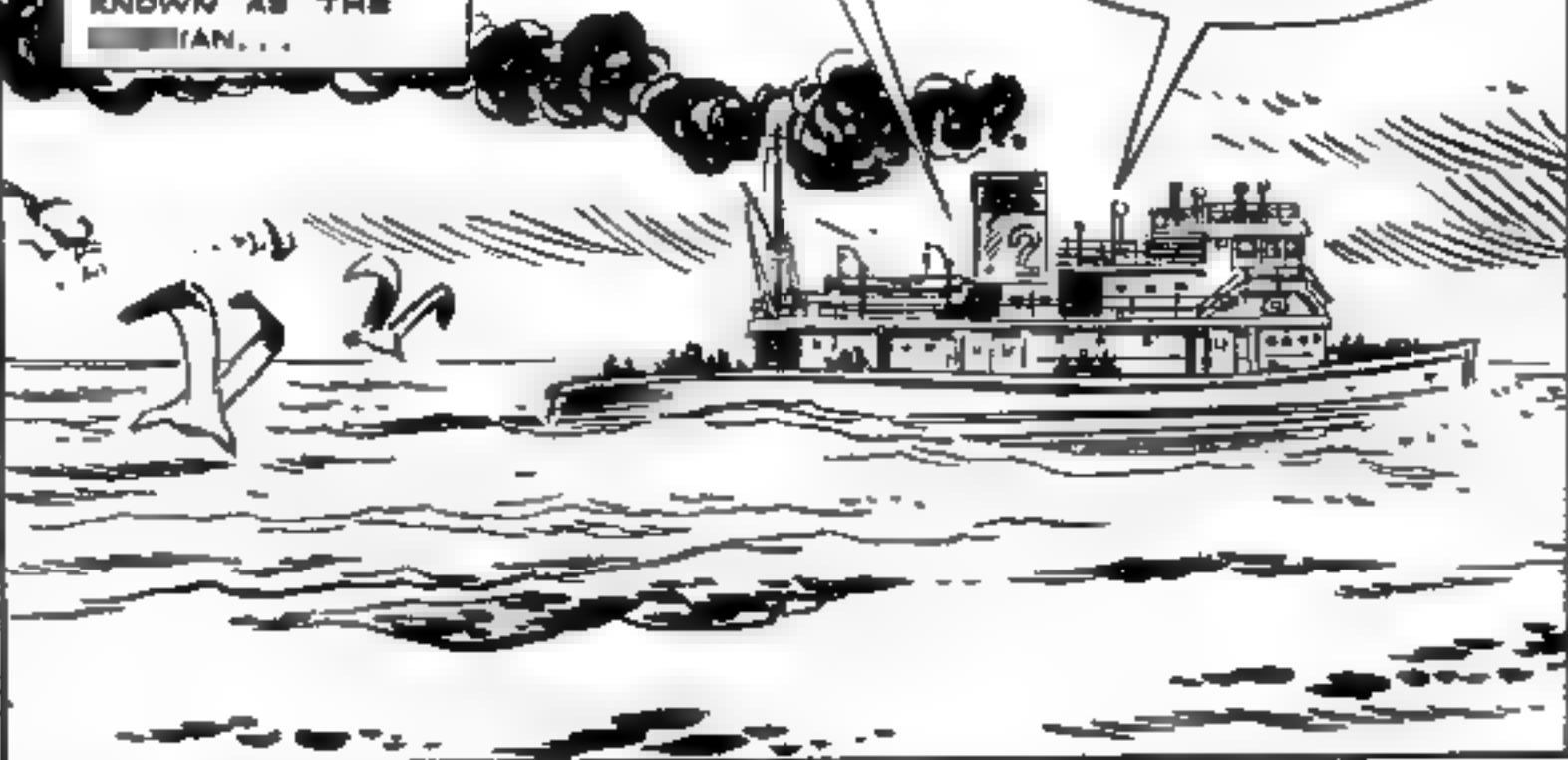


Open Sights

FROM IRAN, THEY
EMBARKED ON A
700-MILE VOYAGE
NORTHWARD
THROUGH THE
GREAT INLAND SEA
KNOWN AS THE
PERSIAN...

IT'S FLAMING
HOT, SIR — ABOUT
AS HOT AS
EGYPT.

FROM WHAT I'VE READ
IT CAN BE COLD ENOUGH
IN WINTER, SIRRRANT—
ESPECIALLY ON THE
STEPPESS AROUND
STALINGRAD.



THEY LANDED AT
ASTRAKHAN IN THE
SOVIET UNION, AND WERE
MET BY AN ENGLISH-
SPEAKING RUSSIAN
OFFICER...

LIEUTENANT KONIEFF —
AT YOUR SERVICE. I AM
TO ESCORT YOU TO YOUR
DESTINATION.



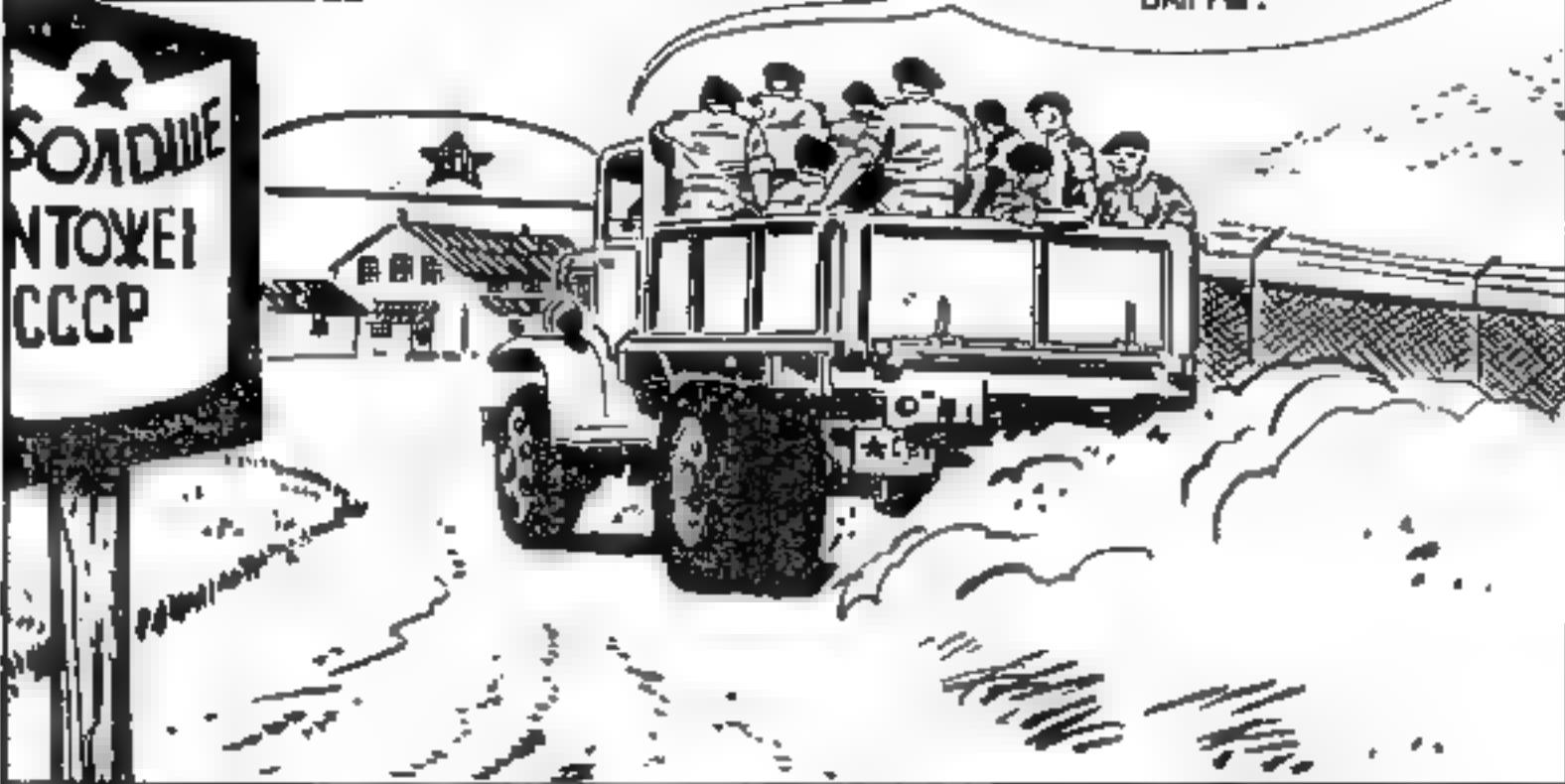
IT WAS 300 MILES BY RAIL FROM ASTRAKHAN TO STALINGRAD, WHERE A TRUCK AWAITED THEM. THEY WERE WHISKED OFF THROUGH THE CITY...

THIS IS KNOWN AS HEROES' SQUARE. AND THE TALL BUILDING OVER THERE IS THE STALINGRAD DEPARTMENT-STORE.



FINALLY, THEY REACHED A RED ARMY BARRACKS A HALF-HOUR'S DRIVE WEST OF STALINGRAD ACROSS A PLAIN CALLED THE DON-VOLGA STEPPE...

HERE WE ARE, MISTER FARRAN — THIS IS ONE OF OUR MILITARY SCHOOLS FOR THE ADVANCED TRAINING OF OFFICERS AND MEN IN ARMoured UNITS.



24

THERE,
IN THOSE BIG
GARAGES, YOU WILL
FIND THE TANKS ON
WHICH YOU WILL GIVE
INSTRUCTION.



DURING THE NEXT FEW
DAYS, THE PARTY OF
DRAGOONS SETTLED DOWN
TO THE BUSINESS OF
INSTRUCTING RED ARMY
TANKMEN, THROUGH
INTERPRETERS, IN THE
INTRICACIES OF CHURCHILL
TANKS...

TELL YOUR MEN THEY CAN
TAKE IT FROM ME, CAPTAIN, THAT
THIS TANK IS THE EQUAL OF ANY
PANZER I EVER CAME UP AGAINST
IN NORTH AFRICA.



SERGEANT DAN MASON'S CREW STOOD BY, LISTENING SCORNFULLY.

THAT BIG-HEAD MASON MAKES ME SICK! FROM THE WAY HE TALKS ANYONE'D THINK HE'D INVENTED PERISHIN' TANKS!



MASON SEEMED TO ENJOY THE SOUND OF HIS OWN VOICE...

LET ME STRESS THAT A TANK-COMMANDER'S TASK IS TO GET FORWARD INTO A POSITION WHERE HE CAN BRING DIRECT FIRE TO BEAR ON HIS ENEMY...



SMUDGER SMITH BARELY SUPPRESSED A SARCASTIC LAUGH AT MASON'S WORDS...



HARK AT HIM! SOME PERISHIN' HERO HE IS! MASON WOULDN'T EVEN BE ABLE TO FIGHT HIS WAY OUT OF A PAPER BAG!

Open Sights

DAY BY DAY, WEEK BY WEEK, BATCH AFTER BATCH OF RUSSIANS WERE INITIATED INTO THE HANDLING OF CHURCHILL TANKS. TO ALL THE DRAGOONS EXCEPT DAN MASON, TEACHING THEM BECAME A MONOTONOUS CHORE...

DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH OF THIS I CAN TAKE, SERGEANT. I'M FED UP WITH THIS JOB, AND SO ARE THE REST OF THE MEN. HOW ABOUT YOU?

BEING A REGULAR, SIR, MAYBE I'M MORE USED TO MAKING THE BEST OF A BAD SITUATION...

4
ШАБЕУ



TO HIMSELF, DAN ADMITTED THE SITUATION SUITED HIM FINE. BUT ONE SUNDAY EVENING, WHEN HE RETURNED FROM A WEEK-END FURLough...

THANKS FOR THE LIFT, TOVARICH. HEY, IS THAT GUNFIRE? SORRY, CHUM, YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND ENGLISH.

NO, HE CAN'T, SERGEANT BUT THAT IS GUNFIRE. THE GERMANS HAVE LAUNCHED AN OFFENSIVE TOWARDS THE RIVER DON.

МОБЕ



I THOUGHT THE RED ARMY
WAS DOING THE ATTACKING
IN THE UKRAINE, LIEUTENANT
KONIEFF.

THAT WAS TRUE, BUT
THE NAZIS HAVE
THROWN A HUNDRED
DIVISIONS INTO AN ALL-
OUT EFFORT. IT
SEEMS THEY ARE
SUCCEEDING...



THE GERMAN 'PUTSCH'
WAS SUCCEEDING.
AT THAT MOMENT,
JACKBOOTED
BATTALIONS WERE
MARCHING WITH THE
STRIDE OF
CONQUERORS...

RAISE YOUR VOICES,
MEN. LET'S HEAR
THE BATTLE-ANTHEM OF
THE REICH — 'DEUTSCHLAND,
DEUTSCHLAND, ÜBER
ALLES'...



Open Sights

EAST OF THE RIVER, HARD-PRESSED RUSSIAN INFANTRYMEN FOUGHT WITH STUBBORN VALOUR TO HOLD A BUCKLED BUT UNBROKEN DEFENCE-LINE...



YET NOTHING SEEMED TO STOP THE IMPETUS OF THE GERMAN ADVANCE...

FORWARD —
FOR FUHRER AND
FATHERLAND!



THE RUSSIANS WERE FORCED BACK...
AND BACK... TO WITHIN THIRTY MILES
OF STALINGRAD...

THE WHOLE
BATTALION IS
DIGGING-IN AS
ORDERED, MAJOR
PETROVSKI.

OUR WATCHWORD
SHOULD BE ATTACK, NOT
DEFENCE / BUT WITHOUT
THE SUPPORT OF TANKS,
HOW CAN WE HOPE TO
SUCCEED ?



THE ACUTE SHORTAGE OF ARMOUR ON THE APPROACHES TO STALINGRAD
PRESENTED A DESPERATE PROBLEM NOW. ALL AVAILABLE IRONCLADS WERE
BEING PEG INTO THE BATTLE...

THERE GO THE
LAST OF THE TANKS
FROM THIS SCHOOL—
EXCEPT FOR THE CHURCHILLS
WE'VE BEEN USING FOR
OUR INSTRUCTION
CLASSES.

IF THE RUSSKIES
HAD ENOUGH STAFF
HERE, THEY'D HAVE
MANNED THOSE THREE AS
WELL AND SPRINTED OFF
TO THE FRONT
WITH 'EM.



Open Sights

THE DUST SETTLED BEHIND THE DEPARTING TANKS. SERGEANT MASON CAME ON THE SCENE. HE WAS TAUT WITH ANGER...

"FARRAN'S OFFERED OUR SERVICES TO THE RUSSKIES. SAID WE'D CREW THE THREE TANKS LEFT HERE!"



THERE WAS A BRIEF SILENCE AS THE OTHER DRAGOONS TOOK IN WHAT MASON HAD SAID. IT WAS A SILENCE BROKEN BY LANCE-CORPORAL HARLAND...

"SO WHAT?"

"SO WHAT? YOU AIN'T GOING TO LET HIM GET AWAY WITH IT, ARE YOU? HE'S NO RIGHT TO HAND US OVER TO THE IVANS FOR CANNON-PODDER!"



HARLAND STUCK OUT HIS JAW...

YOU DO
WHAT YOU LIKE,
SERGEANT MASON, BUT
I'M READY TO FIGHT THE
FERUSHING NAZIS ANY
TIME, ANYWHERE!



A DOZEN OTHER VOICES WERE
RAISED IN SUPPORT FOR THE
LANCE-JACK. DAN MASON
GLOWERED AT THEM SCORINGLY.

OKAY, YOU MUGS,
GET YOURSELVES WIRED
OUT! I'M GOING TO
STALINGRAD, AND I'M ASKING
TO BE REPATRIATED,
DOUBLE-QUICK!



I'M NOT
THE KIND TO
STICK OUT MY NECK
FOR ANYBODY, IF I
CAN HELP IT!
DARNED IF I'LL STICK
IT OUT FOR THE
NAZIS!



THERE WAS NO SIGN OF DAN MASON WHEN LIEUTENANT FARRAN ARRIVED. IT WAS HARLAND WHO TOLD THE OFFICER OF MASON'S DECISION.

SERGEANT MASON
MAY WELL BE WITHIN HIS
RIGHTS. I'M NOT SURE I
HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO
ASK YOU BLOKES TO
BACK ME UP.

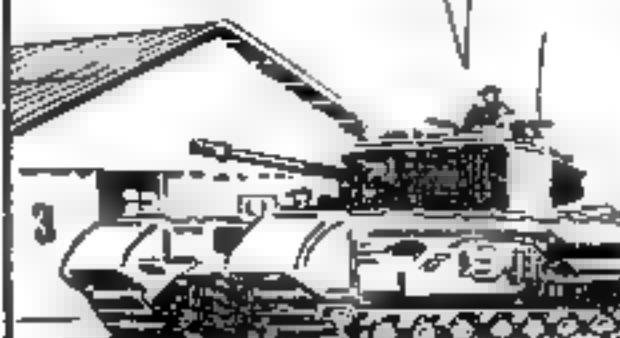
DON'T
WORRY, SIR.
WE'RE ALL
WITH YOU!



THE THREE CHURCHILLS WERE FUELLED, AND LOADED UP WITH
AMMUNITION. THE 350-B.H.P. BEDFORD ENGINES CHURNED
INTO LIFE...

HOLD IT,
DRIVER. WAIT FOR
LIEUTENANT KONIEFF.
HE'LL BE RIDING WITH
US AS LIAISON
OFFICER.

ЖИЗНЬ
ДОСТИГ



KONIEFF TRAVELED ON THE HULL OF FARRAN'S TANK. HE HAD ORDERS TO CONDUCT THE TROOP TO A BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS. FROM THERE HE WAS DIRECTED TO A BATTALION H.Q. .

MAJOR PETROVSKI ?

YES, I AM MAJOR PETROVSKI.



KONIEFF AND PETROVSKI BEGAN TO CONVERSE HEATEDLY. ALTHOUGH THEY SPOKE IN RUSSIAN, FARRAN COULD SEE THAT SOMETHING HAD UPSET THE MAJOR.

WHY MUST I BE SADDLED WITH THESE BRITISH ? WHY CAN I NOT HAVE RUSSIAN-MANNED ARMOUR TO SPEARHEAD THIS ASSAULT ?

BECAUSE THERE IS NO RUSSIAN-MANNED ARMOUR AT HAND. IT HAS ALL BEEN CHANNELLED INTO OTHER SECTORS OF THE FRONT.



MINUTES WENT BY. AT LENGTH, KONIEFF TURNED TO FARRAN...

I'VE JUST BEEN
LEARNING THE DETAILS
OF THE ATTACK. IF
SUCCESSFUL, IT COULD
DEVELOP INTO A LARGE-
SCALE COUNTER-
OFFENSIVE...



HE EXPLAINED THE OPERATION TO THE ENGLISHMAN. WATCHES WERE
SYNCHRONISED, AND, EXACTLY HALF-AN-HOUR LATER, THE CHURCHILLS
LUNGED FORWARD...



THEY CLANKED THROUGH PETROVSKI'S BATTALION AREA AND LUMBERED OUT BEYOND IT. FROM A LONG, LOW FOLD IN THE STEPPE, NARROWED EYES WATCHED THEM . . .

NUMBER ONE
GUN... RANGE—EIGHT
HUNDRED METRES...



THROUGH HIS VISION-SLOT, HARLAND GLIMPSED A WICKED FLASH, AND SAW A TRACER-SHELL BURNING ITS WAY THROUGH THE AIR . . .

GOOD GRIEF!
IT'S COMING
STRAIGHT AT
ME!

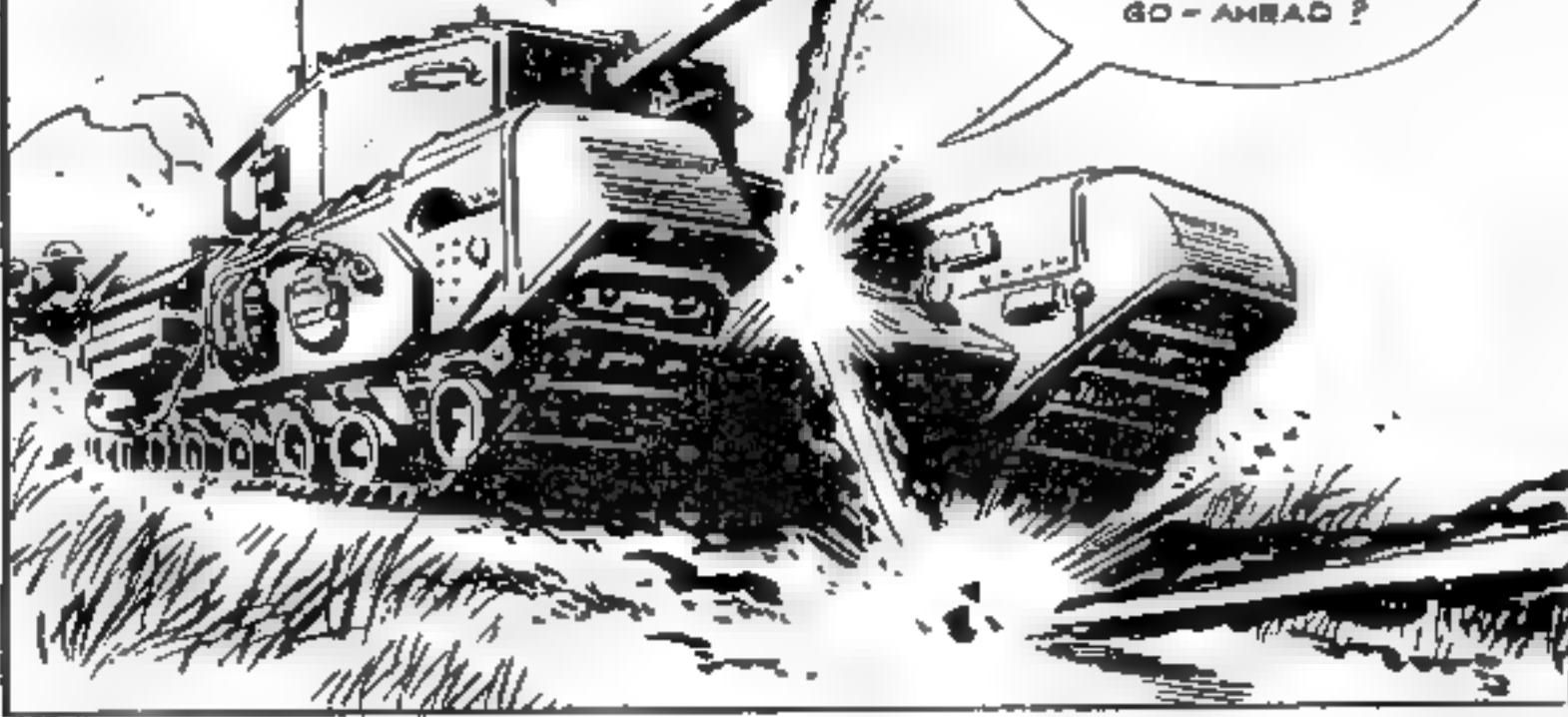


Open Sights

THE FIRE BARBED SHOT DROPPED SHORT, BOUNCED, HIT THE HULL AND RICOCHETED HIGH...

WE'VE COPPED ONE,
DUSTY—SPANG ON THE NOSE!

IT GLANCED OFF,
CORP. NO DAMAGE
DONE. BUT AIN'T IT
ABOUT TIME MISTER
FARRAN GAVE OUR
GUNNERS THE
GO-AHEAD?



AT THAT MOMENT, LIEUTENANT FARRAN
HAD COME TO THE SAME DECISION...

OKAY, SEVENTY-FIVES!
EIGHT HUNDRED YARDS.
TARGET—ENEMY ANTI-
TANK GUNS.
FIRE!



FLAME AND STEEL WHIPPED FROM THE CHURCHILL'S GUN MUZZLES.
THREE SHELLS SCREAMED ACROSS THE STEPPE. TWO MISSED BUT THE
THIRD SMASHED HOME RIGHT ON TARGET!



THE GERMAN POSITION WAS SUDDENLY DAPPLED WITH THE STAB OF HALF-A-DOZEN GUN-FLASHES. HEAVIER GERMAN GUNS HAD TAKEN UP THE BARRAGE...

DRIVERS !
WINKING TACTICS !
HALF-LEFT FOR
FIFTY YARDS...
NOW !



THAT WAS WHERE FARRAN MADE A TRAGIC BLUNDER. UNFAMILIAR WITH THE RUSSIAN METHOD OF ADVANCING IN COLUMN BEHIND PROTECTING ARMOUR, HE EXPOSED THE FOLLOWING INFANTRY TO DIRECT GERMAN FIRE.



ALL ALONG THE NAZI FRONT IN THAT SECTOR OF THE BATTLE-LINE, SMALL-ARMS LASHED OUT A MURDEROUS BLIZZARD OF BULLETS. THE RED ARMY MEN FELL IN DROVES.



SARRAN QUICKLY REALISED HIS ERROR. HE TRIED TO RECTIFY IT, BUT IT WAS TOO LATE. THE RUSSIANS HAD BEEN THROWN INTO CONFUSION, THEIR ATTACK FELL OUT OF GEAR...

THEY'RE BEING
MOWN DOWN! AND
IT'S ALL MY FAULT!
ALL MY FAULT!



NUMBERS OF PETROVSKI'S MEN TRIED TO STRUGGLE ON, BUT THE DEADLY ACCURACY OF THE GERMANS' FIRE BEAT THEM. TO END THE BUTCHERY, PETROVSKI ORDERED A RETREAT...

A HUMAN
SACRIFICE! THAT'S
HOW IT HAS TURNED
OUT, KONIEFF! AND THERE
IS WHERE THE BLAME
LIES! THE
BRITISH!



Open Sights

FARRAN'S TROOP OF CHURCHILLS REVERSED SLOWLY WITH BESAS BLATTERING AND SEVENTY-FIVES POUNDING, IN A DESPERATE EFFORT TO COVER THE WITHDRAWAL...



BUT AS THE TANKS REACHED PETROVSK'S LINES, THE RUSSIAN MAJOR SPUTTERED A VITRIOLIC SPATE OF WORDS AT FARRAN...



Chapter 3. Embattled City

SO THE RUSSIAN COUNTER-OFFENSIVE FAILED. THE GERMANS SEIZED THE INITIATIVE AGAIN, AND BY MID-SEPTEMBER THEY WERE IN STALINGRAD...

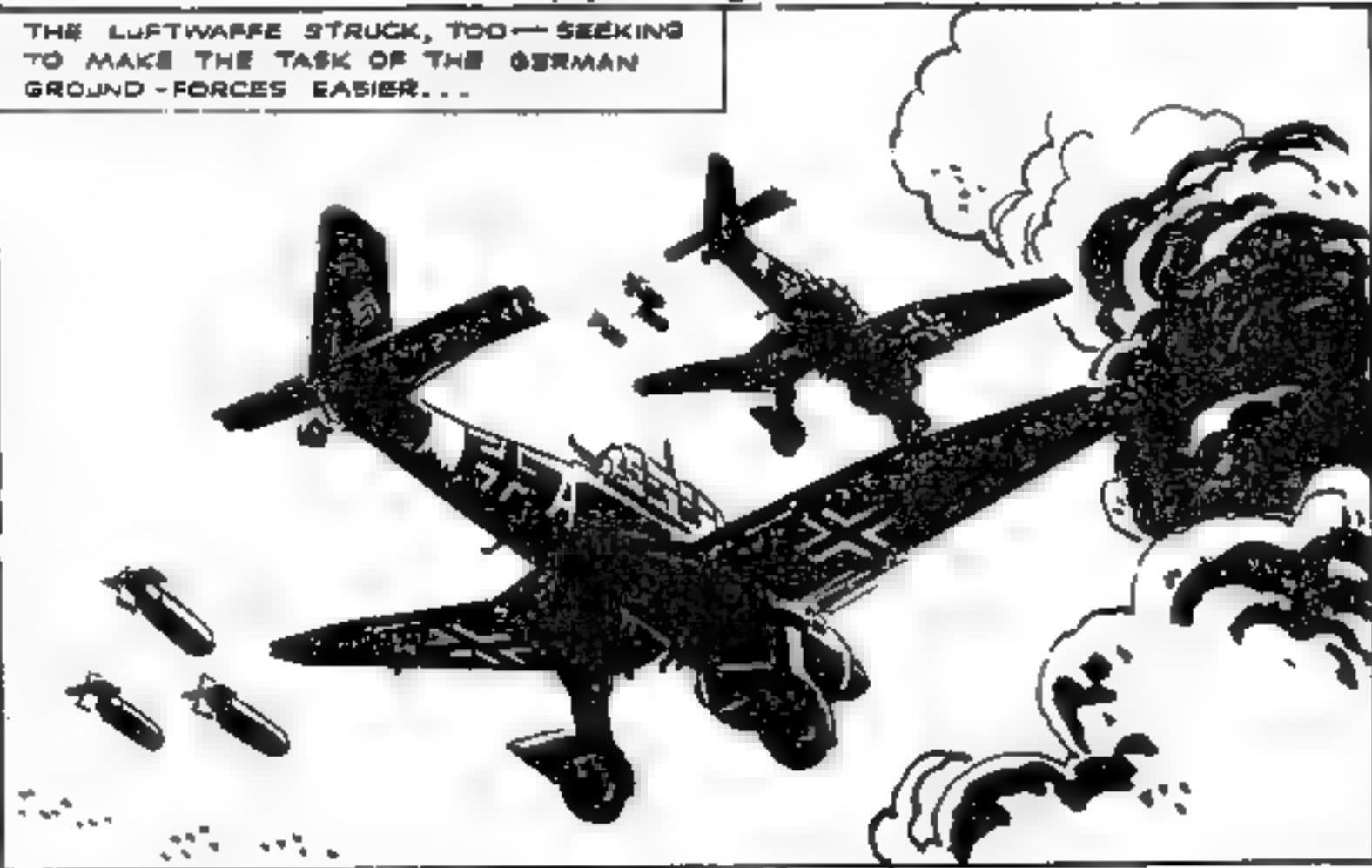


HEAVY ARTILLERY GAVE CLOSE SUPPORT TO THE NAZI STORM-GROUPS. HOWITZER SHELLS SAVAGED THE CITY...

THEY'RE HEADING FOR THE CELLARS !
BY JIMINY ! I'M PICKING A GOOD DREP ONE FOR MYSELF !



THE LUFTWAFFE STRUCK, TOO—SEEKING
TO MAKE THE TASK OF THE GERMAN
GROUND-FORCES EASIER...



ATTACHED TO THE REMNANTS OF A BRIGADE WITH WHICH THEY HAD
RETRIEVED ACROSS THE DON-VOLGA STEPPE, FARRAN AND HIS TROOP FELT
THE POWER OF THE AERIAL BLITZ...

COME, MISTER
FARRAN, GET YOUR MEN
DOWN INTO THE
CELLARS!

NO, LIEUTENANT
KONIEFF, WE'LL TAKE
OUR CHANCE INSIDE OUR
VEHICLES.



THE STREET IN WHICH THE CHURCHILLS WERE PARKED BECAME A SHAMBLES. BUT THE TANKS SURVIVED...

WHAT A CLOSSERING! THERE WON'T BE ANYTHING LEFT OF STALINGRAD BUT A PILE OF RUINS BY THE TIME THE JERRIES TAKE IT, BOB...

IF THEY TAKE IT, SMUGGER...

THE BRIGADE WITH WHICH FARRAN'S TROOP WAS LINKED HAD TAKEN A WAREHOUSE AS THEIR HEADQUARTERS. THE BUILDING WAS A TOTAL WRITE-OFF WHEN THE LUFTWAFFE HAD FINISHED WITH IT...

LOOKS LIKE THE CELLARS STOOD UP TO THE BOMBING

THEY MUST HAVE DONE, MATE. BUT WHAT'S WRONG WITH LIEUTENANT KONIEFF? HE SEEMS TO BE IN A FLAP ABOUT SOMETHING.

Open Sights

COVERED WITH DUST, KONIEFF STUMBED THROUGH THE DEBRIS TO FARRAN'S TANK.



JUST BEFORE THE LAST BOMB FELL, AN S.O.S. WAS RECEIVED FROM ONE OF OUR UNITS WHICH HAS BEEN SURROUNDED AND IS IN DANGER OF ANNIHILATION...

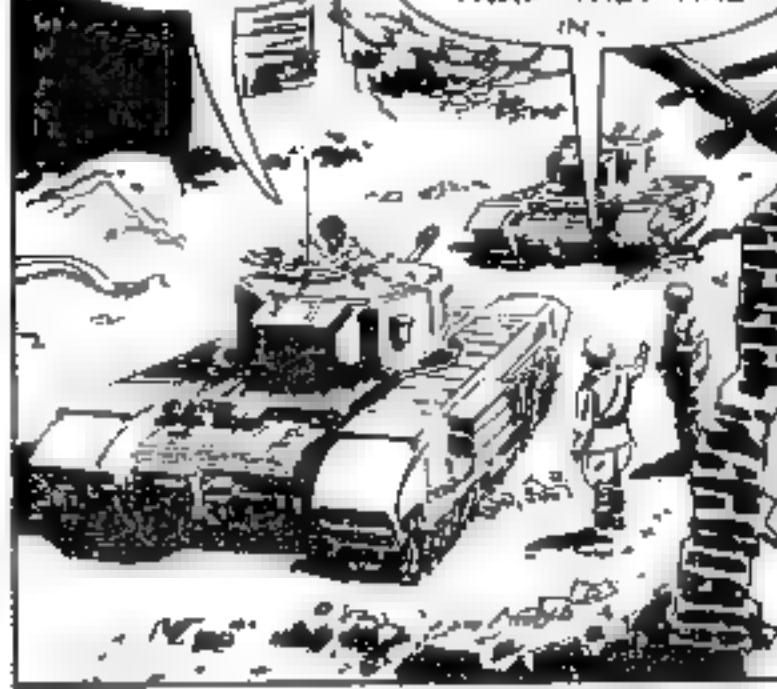
YOUR BRIGADIER WANTS ME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT LIEUTENANT?

YES, SPEED IS VITAL... ONLY, THIS MAY WELL PROVE TO BE A SUICIDAL MISSION

FARRAN ANSWERED THE RUSSIAN LIEUTENANT WITH A GRIM SMILE

LET ME WORRY ABOUT THAT, TOVARICH. WHAT DOES YOUR BRIG. HAVE IN MIND?

HE SUGGESTS BREACHING THE GERMAN RING AND THEN SPEARHEADING OUR MEN OUT OF THE TRAP THEY ARE IN.



THE ENGLISHMAN NODDED. KONIEFF MOTIONED TO THE LEADING IRONCLAD.

I'LL RIDE IN THE FIRST TANK AND LET ITS DRIVER KNOW THE ROUTE...BY THE WAY, THE UNIT WHICH HAS BEEN SURROUNDED IS PETROVSKI'S. DOES THAT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE TO YOU?



IT MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE. THE EXPRESSION ON THE BRITISH SUBALTERN'S FACE BECAME EVEN MORE GRIMLY DETERMINED!

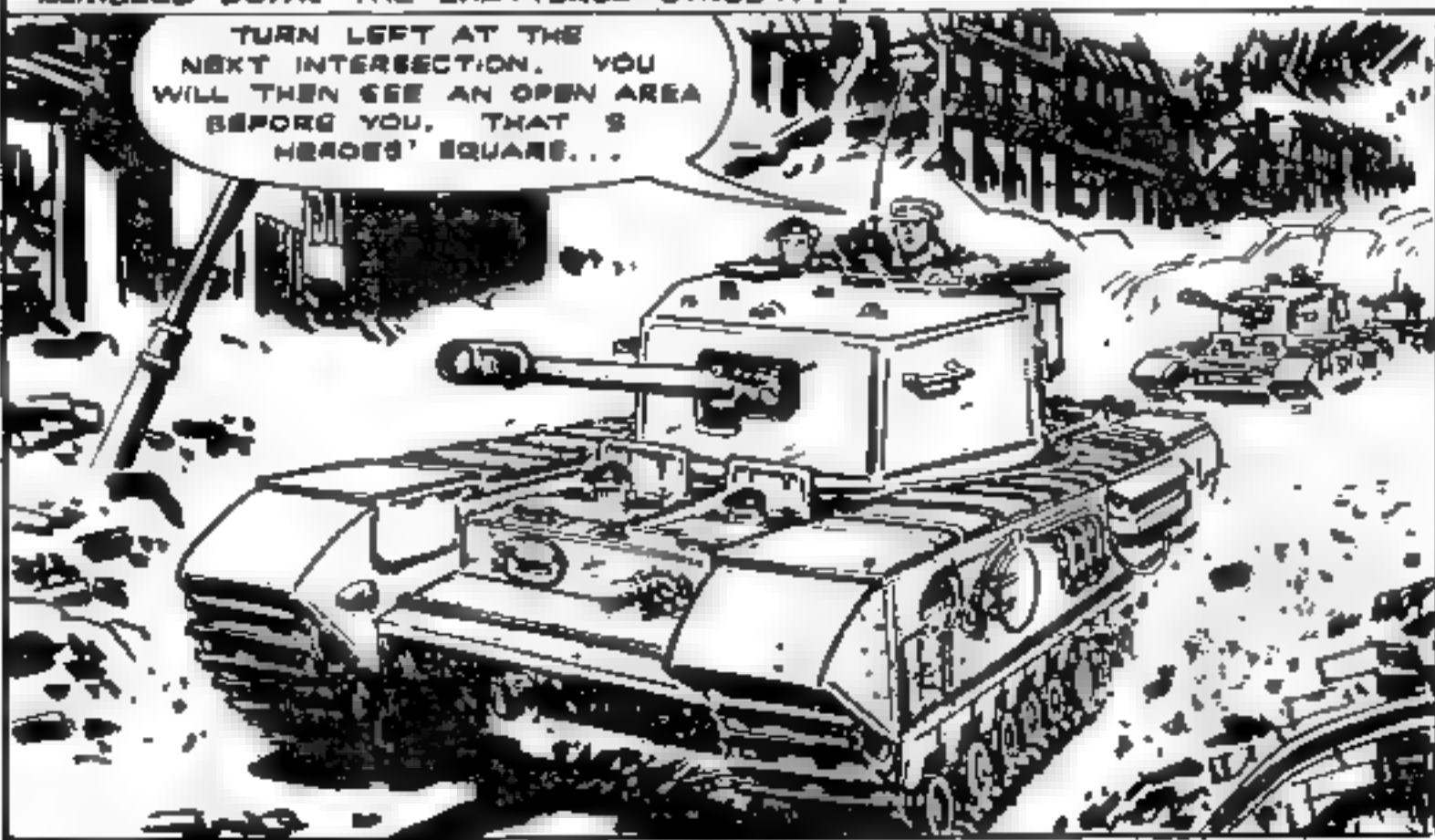
LET'S GET CRACKING, LIEUTENANT KONIEFF! I'LL PULL MAJOR PETROVSKI AND HIS MEN OUT OF THE FIX THEY'RE IN, IF IT'S THE LAST THING I DO! I OWE THEM THAT MUCH!



Open Sights

THE ENGINES GROWLED. THE THREE MAMMOTHS OF MECHANISED WAR RUMBLED DOWN THE SHATTERED STREET...

TURN LEFT AT THE NEXT INTERSECTION. YOU WILL THEN SEE AN OPEN AREA BEFORE YOU. THAT'S HEROES' SQUARE...

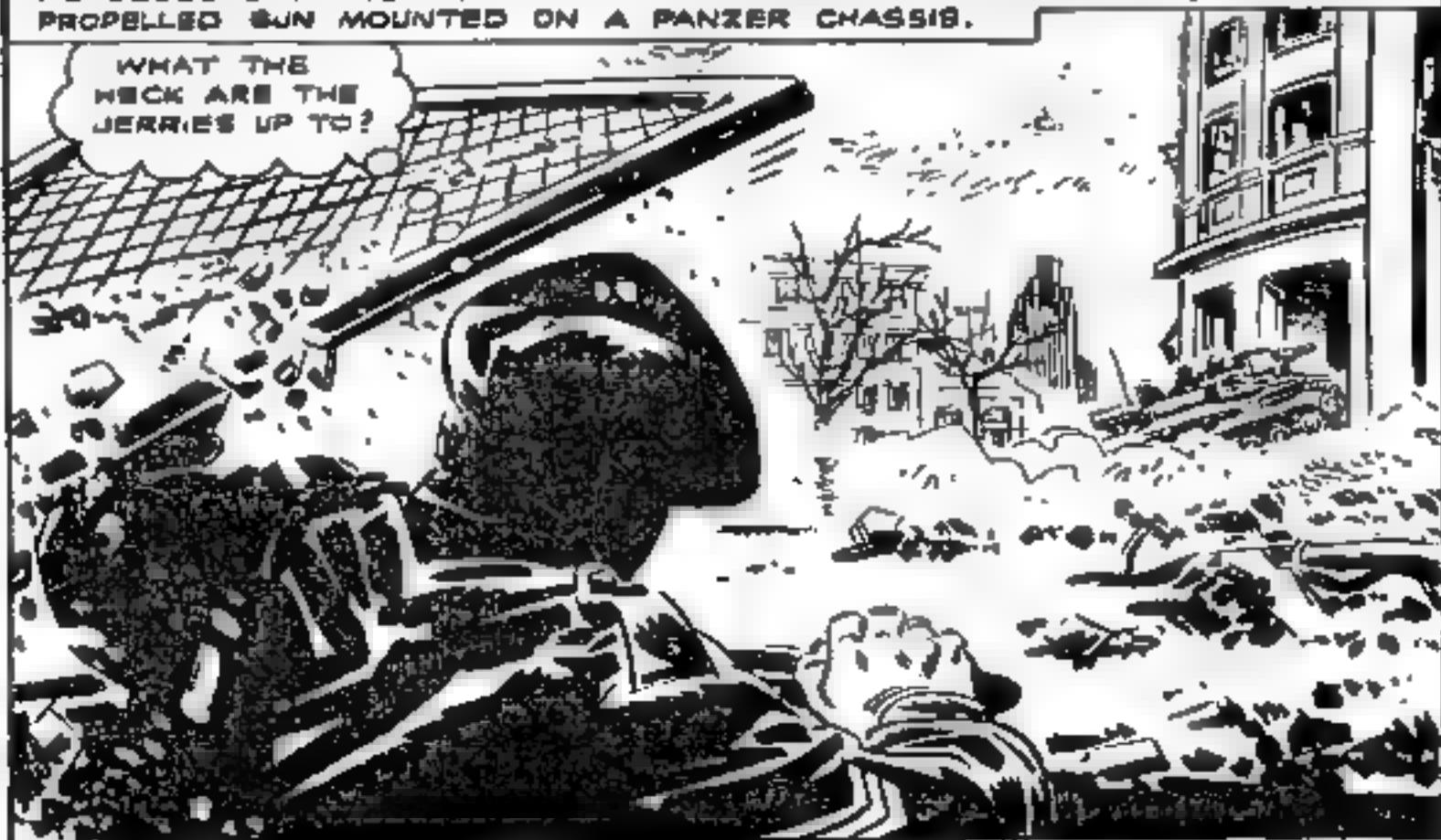


UNKNOWN TO KONIERS, AT THAT MOMENT, ANOTHER TRACKED VEHICLE WAS MOVING TOWARDS HEROES' SQUARE.



BOBBING UP WARILY FROM A CELLAR, ONE OF STALINGRAD'S UNDERGROUND REFUGEES SPOTTED IT. IT WAS A GERMAN STURMGESCHUTZ, A SELF-PROPELLED GUN MOUNTED ON A PANZER CHASSIS.

WHAT THE HECK ARE THE JERRIES UP TO?



A CASTAWAY ON THE TIDE OF WAR, ■■■■■ MASON SOON HAD THE ANSWER TO HIS QUESTION. WITHIN MINUTES, THE MOBILE GUN CLAIMED A VICTIM...



SO THAT'S THEIR IDEA, BH? STAY OUT OF SIGHT AND LIE DOGGO TILL THEY CAN'T MISS! DEAD-CRAFTY...



THE RUSSIAN LORRY,
PACKED WITH TROOPS,
WAS A TOTAL WRECK...

WIPED OUT, EVERY
ONE OF 'EM. I'D BETTER
SIT TIGHT AND KEEP OUT
OF SIGHT—OR I'LL
WIND UP THE SAME
WAY.

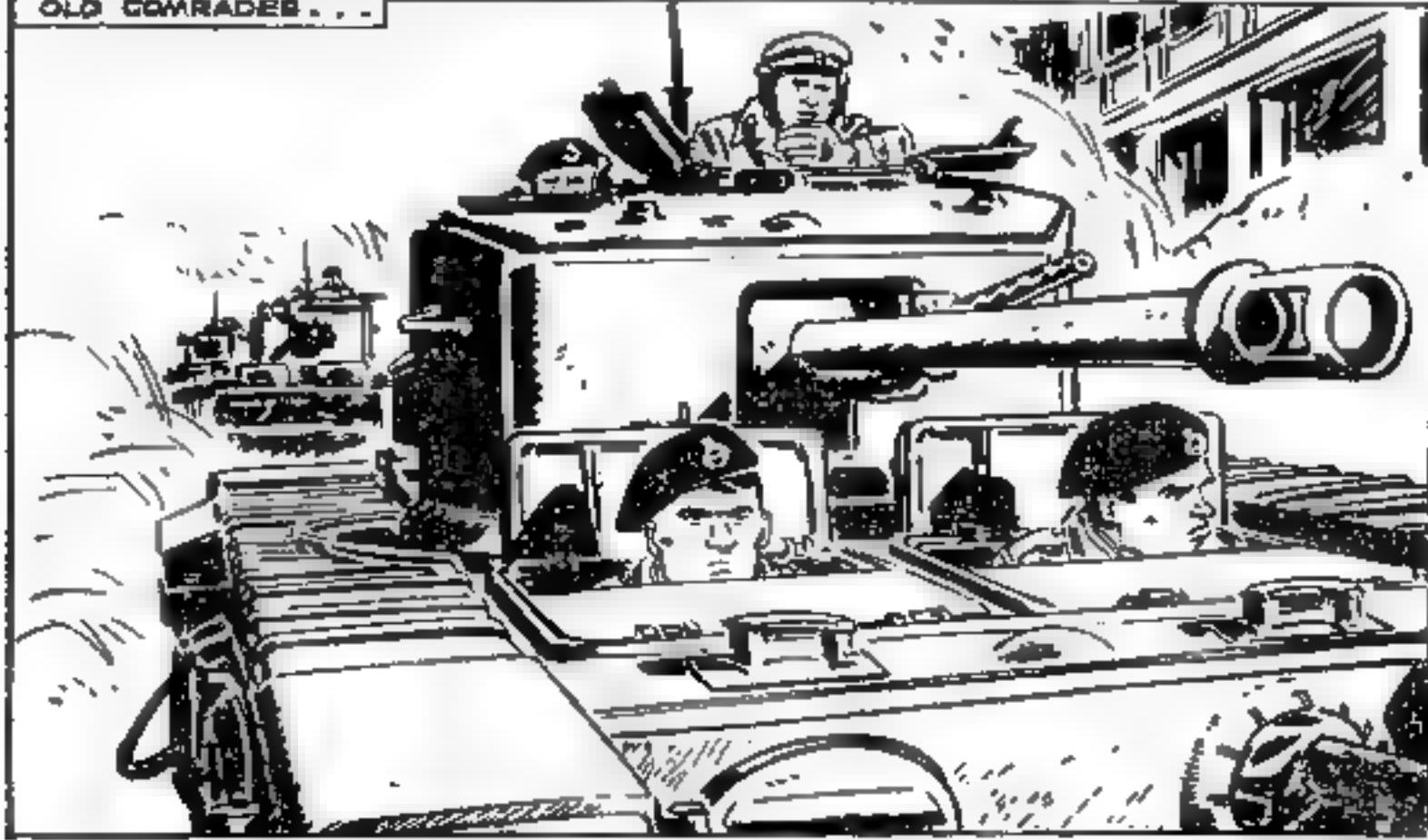


DAN MASON HAD BARELY MUTTERED THOSE WORDS OF COUNSEL TO HIMSELF WHEN HE HEARD THE BEAT OF ENGINES AND THE GRINDING OF CATERPILLAR TRACKS.

CHURCHILLS! MAYBE
SHOULD NIP OUT AND
WARN THE RUSSKI IN THE
TURRET OF THAT FIRST
ONE. NO, BETTER NOT.
I'D BE A TARGET FOR
THE JERRIES THE
MINUTE I SHOWED
MYSELF.



THEN MASON REALISED THAT, ALTHOUGH THE MAN IN THE TURRET OF THE LEADING CHURCHILL WAS RUSSIAN, THE DRIVER AND CO-DRIVER WERE HIS OLD COMRADES . . .



HE WAS WATCHING FARRAN'S TROOP, THE TROOP TO WHICH HE HAD BELONGED. HE WAS WATCHING FORMER COMRADES ADVANCING TO A RENDEZVOUS WITH SUDDEN AND CERTAIN DEATH .

THE NAZIS'LL
WAIT TILL ALL THREE
CHURCHILLS ARE IN THE
SQUARE. THEN THEY'LL
BLAST 'EM IN QUICK
SUCCESSION .



Open Sights

AT THAT INSTANT, SOMETHING HAPPENED TO SERGEANT DAN MASON...



HE SHED THE 'OLD SOLDIER' GUSE, AND BECAME WHAT YEARS OF TRAINING HAD MADE HIM IN SPITE OF HIMSELF — A SOLDIER, NOTHING LESS!



MASON STARTED TO RUN FULL-PELT. HE HEARD THE FEROCIOUS CRACK OF THE ENEMY GUN. A SHELL WHIZZED PAST HIM, SCORCHINGLY . . .

IF THIS DON'T BEAT ALL! IT'S SAR'NT MASON!

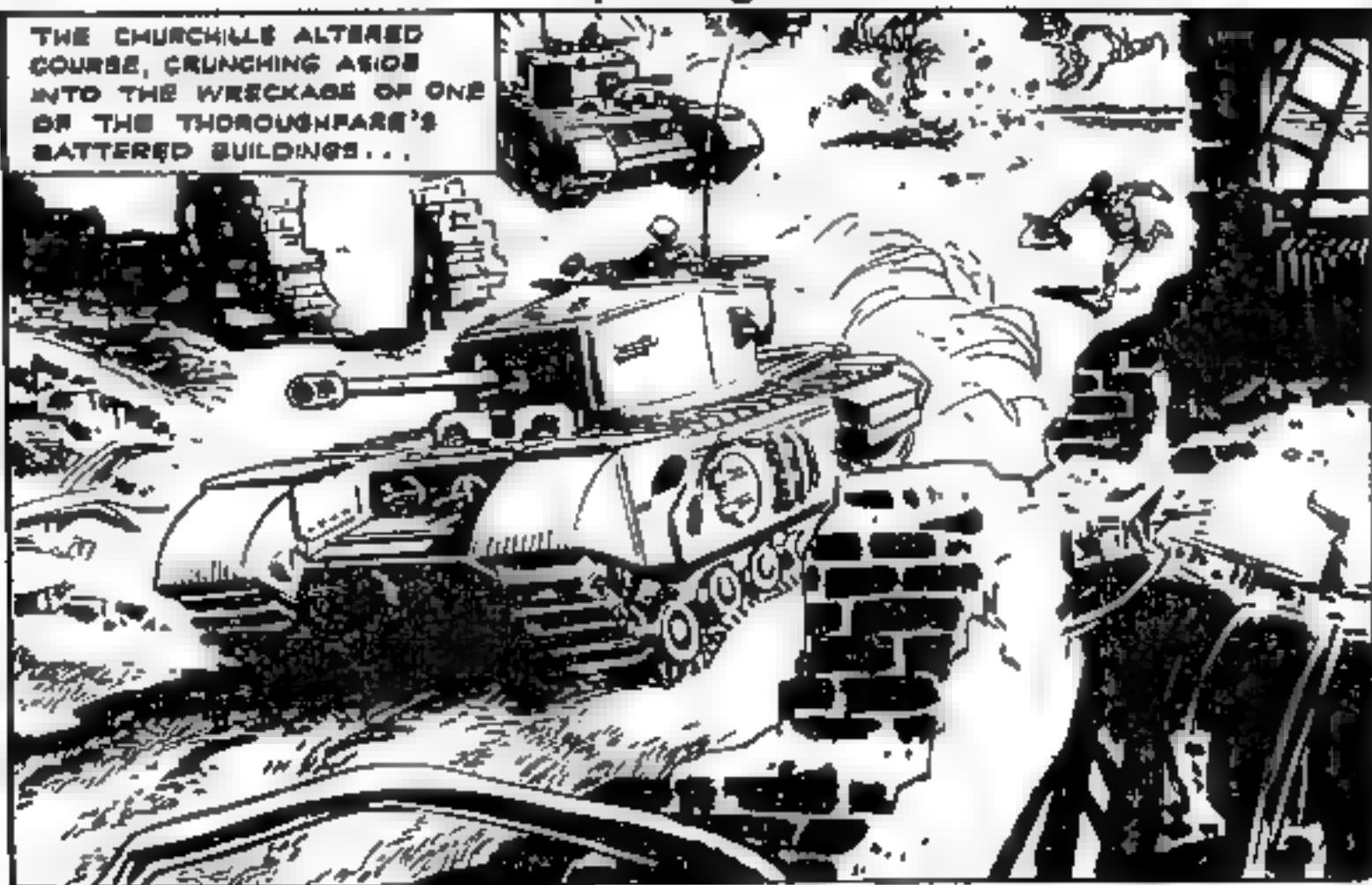


THE GERMAN SHELL WAS NOT ON TARGET. IT SPENT ITS SAVAGE FORCE AGAINST BRICKS AND MORTAR . . .

DRIVERS, GET US OFF THE STREETS AND UNDER COVER! TURN INTO THE RUINS!



THE CHURCHILLS ALTERED COURSE, CRUNCHING ASIDE INTO THE WRECKAGE OF ONE OF THE THOROUGHFARE'S BATTERED BUILDINGS . . .



MASON JOINED THEM IN THE SHELTER OF THE DEBRIS . . .

THERE'S A JERRY GUN TUCKED AWAY IN THE BIG DEPARTMENT-STORE, SIR. YOU'LL HAVE TO GIVE THE SQUARE A WIDE BIRTH, MISTER FARRAN.



LIEUTENANT KONIEFF CHIPPED IN BLUNTLY...

"WE ARE TO RESCUE PETROVSK
AND HIS MEN, WE CANNOT GIVE
HEROES' SQUARE A WIDE BERTH! WE
MUST CROSS IT TO REACH
THEM!"



FARRAN LOOKED AT KONIEFF, GAVE A BRISK NOD THEN SWITCHED HIS ATTENTION TO MASON AGAIN...

"NO TIME TO EXPLAIN, SERGEANT,
BUT T'S GOT TO BE
HEROES' SQUARE..."

"ALL RIGHT, SR,
JUST GIVE ME A FEW
MINUTES I THINK
CAN STOP THAT GUN
FROM BREATHING
DOWN YOUR NECKS..."



Open Sights

DAN MASON HEFTED THE SUB-MACHINE-GUN HE HAD GRABBED. HE FELT STRANGELY EXALTED... YET, DEEP DOWN, HE WAS CONSCIOUS OF A LINGERING SENSE OF SHAME, TOO...

WAIT,
SERGEANT.
SOME OF US HAD
BEST GO WITH
YOU

ONE MAN'LL
RUN LESS RISK OF
DRAWING FIRE THAN
A PARTY, SIR.
BESIDES, I'VE A
NASTY TASTE TO WASH
OUT OF MY MOUTH FOR
SLOPPING OFF LIKE
I DID...



HE DISAPPEARED AMID THE RUBBLE. ALONE, HE WORKED HIS WAY ROUND HEROES' SQUARE. HE WAS ALMOST IN POSITION WHEN LUCK DESERTED HIM... HE SLIPPED ON THE TREACHEROUS RUBBLE...

SUFFERING
WILDCATS!



ALERTED, THE GERMAN ARTILLERYMEN DIVED BACK FROM THEIR GUN, SMALL ARMS IN THEIR HANDS. A STREAM OF SCHMEISSER BULLETS PECKED AT THE DUST CLOSE TO MASON.



MASON HAD NO CHANCE TO DIVE FOR COVER IN THAT WITHERING HOT SPOT OF CONCENTRATED FIRE . . .



Open Sights

DAN'S BODY JERKED AS THE NAZI BULLETS STRUCK HIM. SOMEHOW, HE BROUGHT HIS OWN GUN INTO PLAY, HOsing THE GERMANS WITH A STREAM OF LEAD . . .



FROM ACROSS THE SQUARE, FARRAN'S TROOP HEARD THE SERGEANT SHOUTING THAT THE WAY WAS CLEAR. HIS VOICE SOUNDED STRONG ENOUGH, BUT HE COULD HARDLY RAISE A WHISPER WHEN FARRAN FOUND HIM . . .



FUNNY THE WAY THINGS GO, SIR. I'D COUNTED ON BEING TWO THOUSAND MILES FROM HERE BY NOW. AS IT IS, I WILL NEVER LEAVE STALINGRAD . . . NOT UNDER MY OWN STEAM . . .



THE CHURCHILLS LUMBERED FORWARD AGAIN, TO ENCOUNTER THE FIRE OF ENEMY INFANTRY FROM A BROAD BOULEVARD . . .



THE TANKS' BESAS AND SEVENTY-FIVES OPENED UP. THE GREY-CLAD FIGURES IN FRONT OF THEM WILTED UNDER A STORM OF LEAD AND STEEL. BUT THERE WAS DANGER ABOVE . . .



PARTIZAN'S BULLET DRILLED A WEHRMACHT CORPORAL AS HE WAS ABOUT TO LET FLY WITH A STICK-GRENADE. THERE WERE OTHER NAZIS READY TO THROW...



THE THREE IRONCLADS RAN THE GAUNTLET OF A DELUGE OF HAND-BOMBS...



Open Sights

THE TRACKS SUFFERED NO DAMAGE. FARTHER ALONG THE BOULEVARD, BARAN AND HIS PARTY MET THE REMNANTS OF PETROVSKI'S UNIT...



LIEUTENANT KONIEFF,
I SUGGEST WE GO BACK
THE WAY WE CAME. TELL
THE MAJOR TO FOLLOW
RIGHT BEHIND US WITH
HIS MEN.



Open Sights

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PETROVSKI EYED THE RESCUERS UNCERTAINLY. IT WAS PLAIN HE HAD LITTLE FAITH IN THEM. HE AGREED TO KAERAN'S PROPOSALS BRADDOINGLY.



BUT BEFORE LONG, PETROVSKI HAD CAUSE TO REVISE HIS OPINIONS...



COVER THE
UPPER WINDOWS,
GUNNERS, AND
SHOOT AT ANY
SIGN OF
MOVEMENT!

MY MEN
COULD NEVER
HAVE FOLKTHTHEIR
WAY OUT OF THIS
RING. IT LOOKS AS
IF THE BRITISHERS
WILL GET US
THROUGH...



Open Sights

BACK AT THE CHURCHILLS' START POINT, KONIEFF TRANSLATED A GRAMING SPEECH MADE BY PETROVSKI.

THE MAJOR WISHES TO EXTEND HIS WARMEST THANKS TO YOU AND YOUR CREWS. HE HOPES THAT ONE DAY IN THE FUTURE, YOU AND HE WILL BE ABLE TO CELEBRATE THE OCCASION TOGETHER.

TELL THE MAJOR IT'S A DATE.

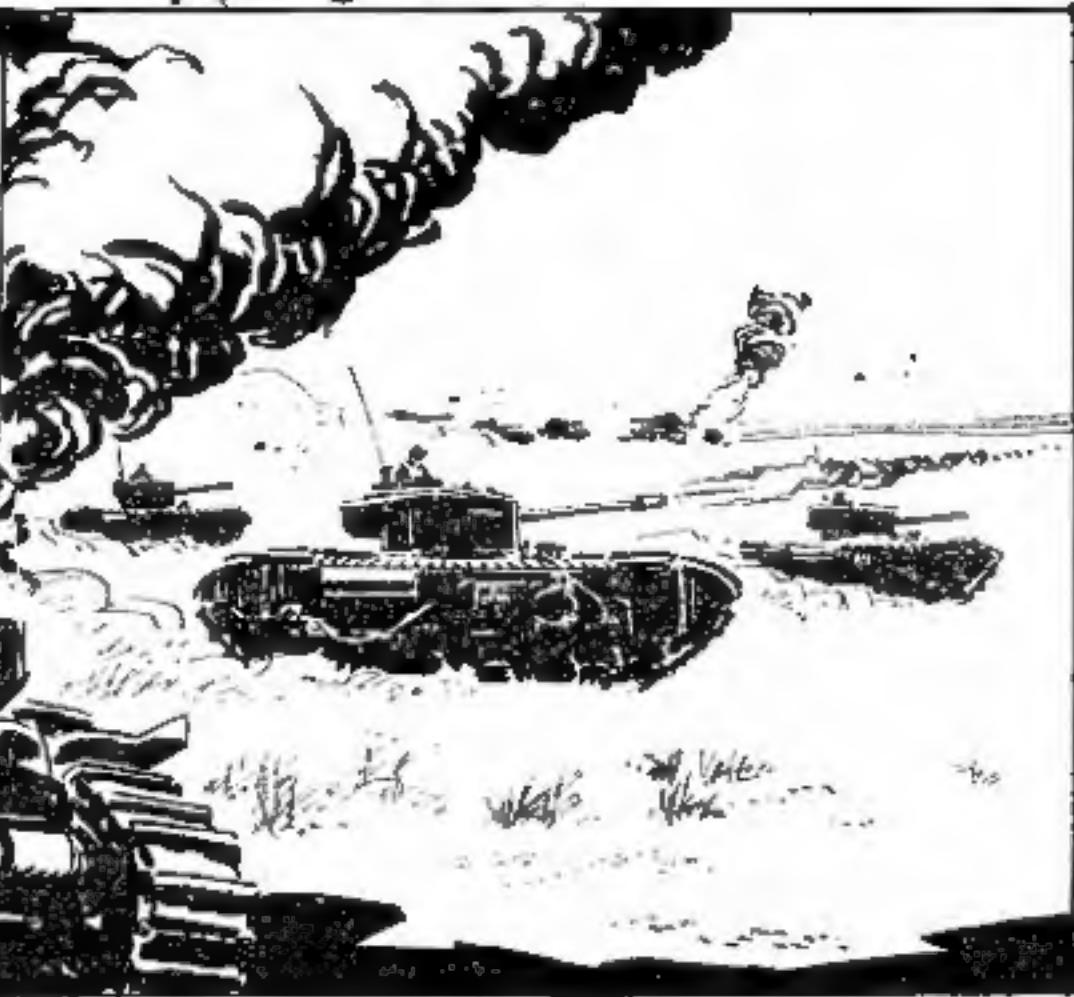


THAT WAS A DATE FARRAN COULD NOT KEEP. STALINGRAD WAS RELIEVED ONLY WHEN RUSSIAN COUNTER-BLOWS AND WINTER'S ICY GRIP COMBINED TO DESTROY THE MORALE OF THE CITY'S INVADERS.

IT IS A WHOLESALE SURRENDER... THE END OF A GERMAN FORMATION THAT WAS ORIGINALLY HALF-A-MILLION STRONG!



BUT FARRAN AND HIS TROOP HAD BEEN RECALLED LONG BEFORE THEN. ONCE AGAIN, THEY WERE IN NORTH AFRICA, WITH THE VICTORY OF ALAMEIN BEHIND THEM—AND ROMMEL'S AFRIKA KORPS BACK-PEDALLING IN FRONT OF THEM...



ONLY ONE OF THE BRITISH DRAGOON TROOP REMAINED IN STALINGRAD WHEN THE RAVAGED CITY WAS RECLAIMED BY ITS RIGHFUL OWNERS...



DAN MASON RESTED WHERE HE HAD FALLEN...

MAYBE DAN MASON WAS THERE IN SPIRIT, TOO — WATCHING THAT SHIVERING, SHUFFLING, BLEARY-EYED FAMISHED RABBLE...



MEN WHO HAD ONCE GOOSE-STEPSSED ARROGANTLY WERE NOW A WOE-BEGONE VANGUARD ON THE LONE ROAD OF DEFEAT AND DISASTER DOWN WHICH THE NAZIS WERE TO DRAG THE WHOLE GERMAN NATION...

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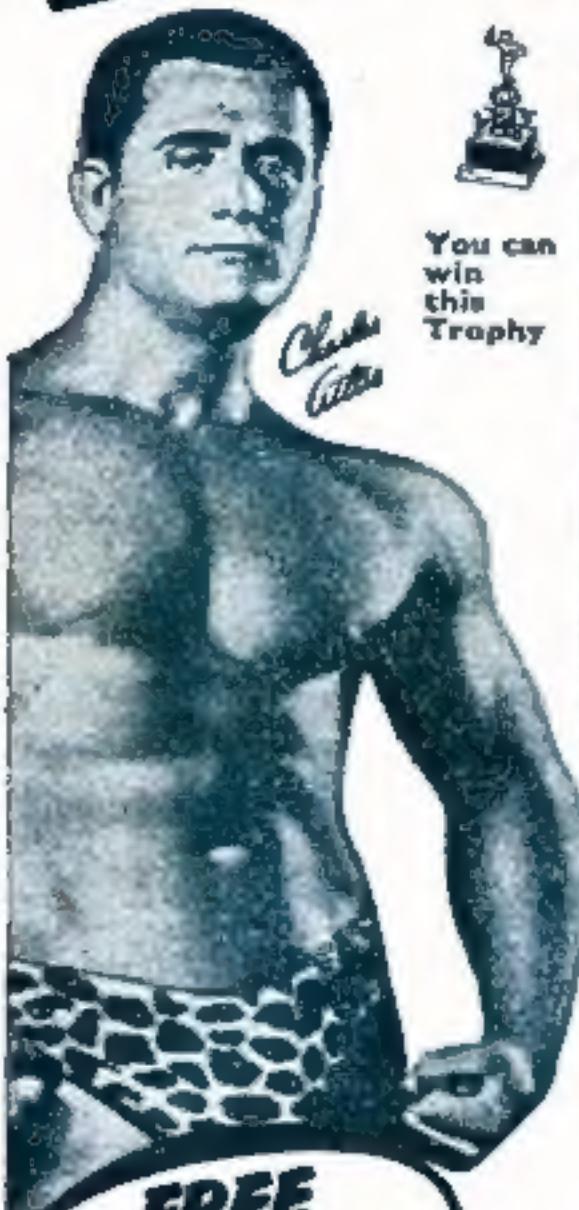
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